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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002915

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN TEACHERS UNIONS OPPOSED TO ANY REDUCTIONS
IN SALARIES/BENEFITS TO FULFILL DEAL WITH IMF

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 2792
 1B. TEGUCIGALPA 2662
 1C. TEGUCIGALPA 2034

11. (SBU) Summary: Honduran teachers' unions are a key player in the ongoing effort by the GOH to complete the domestic requirements of a deal with the IMF (ref A). The five teachers' unions, three for primary teachers and two for secondary teachers, strongly oppose a proposed civil service law (ref C) that would make any changes in the cherished teachers' law that has been the subject of much debate due to its salary and benefits provisions. The teachers' unions argue strongly that teachers' pay and benefits are not the cause of the weak fiscal situation of the GOH, although they do acknowledge that the sheer number of teachers (almost 45,000) made the overall impact on public sector salaries significant. The two secondary teachers' unions in particular are prolific protesters, and are unlikely to back down in the face of GOH pressure to reach a compromise. However, Post continues to believe (ref B) that Congress will pass necessary legislation, encompassing several controversial issues, to allow the GOH to complete its side of the IMF deal. In addition, Post believes that any resulting protests will not destabilize the government. End Summary.

Honduran Teachers' Unions - a Thumbnail Sketch

12. (U) Over the last couple of months LabAtt has spoken with representatives of all five teachers' unions in Honduras (three primary teachers' unions and two secondary teachers' unions). The five are:

COPEMH - College of Secondary School Teachers of Honduras
- part of the United Confederation of Honduran Workers) CUTH labor confederation, but not currently active in the confederation
- claim 15,000 members (secondary teachers)
- led by Eulogio Chavez (being replaced in January by Nelson Calix)

COLPROSUMAH - Honduran Professional Teachers College
- part of the CUTH confederation
- claim 22-25,000 members (mostly primary teachers)
- led by Rafael Izaguirre

COPRUMH - Honduran Professional Association Teachers Union
- not affiliated with one of the three labor confederations
- claim 4,500 members (mostly secondary teachers)
- led by Angel Martinez

PRICPHMA - First Professional Honduran College of Teachers
- part of the General Workers Central (CGT) confederation
- claim 18,000 members (primary teachers)
- led by Alejandro Ventura

SINPRODOH
- part of the CGT confederation
- claim 7-8,000 members (primary teachers)
- led by Fanny Alvarez

Note: Primary teachers require degrees from a "normal" school (a teachers' high school). Secondary teachers must have university degrees, and some have master's degrees. The Ministry of Education states that there are approximately 35,529 public primary teachers (including pre-school teachers) and approximately 8,970 public secondary teachers. There are 130,980 public sector employees, including municipal and parastatal employees, which is 5.8 percent of all formal sector employees. End Note.

2002 Agreement and the Teachers' Law

13. (U) COLPROSUMAH, PRICPHMA, and SINPRODOH, as well as the Pedagogical College, all signed the July 5, 2002 agreement

with the GOH that lays out terms for applying the teachers' law in 2002-2005 (signed by Minister of Education Carlos Molina, Minister of Labor German Leitzelar, and then-advisor to President Maduro, Cesar Batres). The GOH applied the terms of the agreement to the other two teachers' unions that did not sign, COPEMH and COPRUMH. COLPROSUMAH said that they believe that teachers made concessions in this agreement and are loath to make more. SINPRODOH claimed the GOH is not even living up to its side of the 2002 agreement, and COPEMH said that the GOH is not fully abiding by the terms of the teachers' law. All the unions criticized the GOH as not being serious about investing in quality education.

14. (U) All of the teachers' unions are opposed to any changes by the GOH that would alter the teachers' law (1997) that spells out pay and benefits for primary and secondary public teachers. (Note: Most teachers' unions distanced themselves from the doctor's law that sets pay and benefits for doctors, although COPEMH pointedly said they support that law as well out of solidarity. The doctors are represented by a professional association that is not affiliated with one of the three labor confederations. End Note.) Any new general "Law of Salary Equity" for public sector workers under consideration by the GOH must not negatively affect the teachers' law, said PRICPHMA.

15. (U) Specifically, the teachers oppose getting rid of: seniority pay (automatic pay increases every few years), academic qualification bonus (saying it is a key factor in motivating teachers to improve their professional expertise by seeking a higher degree), or any change in: hourly pay, pension benefits, or the income tax exemption for teachers (even though most teachers make under the minimum income tax threshold according to COPEMH).

16. (U) All the unions noted that even the highest paid teacher does not make much when compared to doctors, but agreed that the sheer number of teachers (almost 45,000) made the overall impact on public sector salaries significant. (Note: In comparison, according to the Ministry of Health, there are only 1,790 public sector doctors, 911 professional nurses, and 5,369 "auxiliary nurses," as of December. End Note.) SINPRODOH claimed that only Nicaraguan teachers are paid less than Honduran teachers in Central America. The teachers' unions argue strongly that teachers pay and benefits are not the cause of the weak fiscal situation of the GOH. Teachers' unions point to the weak economy, insufficient tax receipts, bailouts for failed banks, loan forgiveness to farmers, tax breaks for certain businesses, pay to political appointees, and corruption as the causes of the GOH's problems. The GOH is not concerned with the poor or working class, but rather the rich and powerful, claimed the unions.

Teachers a Regular Participant in Anti-GOH Protests

17. (SBU) The secondary teachers are the more radical of the teachers' unions, having refused to sign the 2002 agreement with the GOH and taking part in numerous protests, some of which have included Molotov cocktails, vandalism, and the desecration of a U.S. flag outside the Embassy in one instance. COPEMH is closely linked with the Popular Block, a leftist association of unions, NGOs, a leftist political party (UD) and protesters, led by Carlos H. Reyes. As such, COPEMH, by its own admission, has been a constant adversary of the GOH on the issue of teachers pay and benefits. COPEMH is also a member of the National Coordinator of Popular Resistance, a newer protest group that fiercely opposes changes to the teachers' law. Any significant action by Congress that teachers interpret as reforming or revoking aspects of the teachers' law is likely to bring teachers out on the streets in large numbers to protest.

18. (U) The primary teachers' unions are more mainstream: COLPROSUMAH explicitly told LabAtt that they are not interested in social chaos and SINPRODOH said they understand that an IMF agreement is needed.

19. (U) The teachers' unions criticized the GOH for threatening them and not negotiating in good faith. None of the unions had met with the IMF to discuss these issues, but the CGT and CUTH labor confederations, in coordination with the Federation of Teachers Organizations of Honduras (FOMH) and the Permanent Forum of Civil Society Organizations (FPOSC), did publish a large ad in newspapers during the recent visit of the IMF team laying out their objections to a prospective GOH deal with the IMF.

Teachers a Powerful Interest Group

110. (SBU) Comment: In addition to the almost 45,000 current public teachers and the numerous retired teachers, there are many Hondurans who either (a) studied to be a teacher but hold a different type of job, or (b) have friends/family that

are teachers. The teachers' law was passed in 1997 with bipartisan (National and Liberal Party) support. This means that any new legislation viewed as detrimental to the teachers will both be politically painful to get through Congress and could find negative resonance in a significant part of the population, much more so than with the doctors. Teachers' unions, which have not met with the IMF, warn that the Fund neglects this potential negative reaction at its own peril. However, Post continues to believe (ref B) that Congress will pass the necessary legislation (on civil service salaries and other issues) to allow the GOH to complete its side of the IMF deal, and that any resulting protests are unlikely to destabilize the GOH. End Comment.
Palmer